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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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INFORMATION

September 8, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM:

Phil Odeen *PO*

SUBJECT:

Assessment of the Campaign Against  
North Vietnam's Capability to Wage War

*Noted by HAK*

From your cover note it is apparent you have looked at the latest DIA assessment (Tab A). As the DIA format does not facilitate a quick review, this memo draws on the DIA report as well as other current intelligence to organize the intelligence data around four major analytical topics:

- Import denial,
- Bomb damage,
- Battlefield supplies,
- Disruption costs.

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INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

Import Denial

One of the key ways in which the current campaign is different from the bombing in the 1960s is that by mining the ports we have denied the enemy his primary means of importing the goods essential for his economy and war effort. The enemy has reacted by concentrating his effort on establishing alternative import routes.

-- Two pipelines have been completed to the Chinese border area and POL arrivals are now estimated to be at least equal to current consumption. A third pipeline is nearly finished.

-- Rail LOCs between China and the Hanoi area have been the primary focus of enemy repair effort. After an initial period of slow reaction while repair crews were mobilized, the northeast rail line has

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NSA review completed

DIA review completed

been kept open for shuttling during much of July and August despite our weather-constrained efforts to keep it more fully interdicted. Enemy repair efforts on the less important northwest line have been slower, but that line has also been open for some shuttling.

-- The roads from China south have been the prime enemy alternative to seaborne imports aside from POL. Our strikes at road bridges and supply areas have caused only occasional delays and damaged and destroyed only a small fraction of the supplies and trucks involved. The weather will soon cause some deterioration in the roads but the clouds will also limit the effectiveness of our road and rail bombing even more.

CIA estimates imports in June and July were slightly less than half of last year's average daily level (3,000 vice 6,100 tons).

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Intelligence intercepts indicate the enemy is giving priority to POL and food. We can assume needed military supplies are receiving an even higher priority. Some lower priority items such as fertilizer apparently are not yet being imported overland. The planned volume of food deliveries in August would be sufficient to bring average food deliveries for June-July-August up to the average monthly level for 1971.

We have little information on the extent to which the USSR and China are providing replacements for losses of military equipment. But DIA identified 12 heavy tanks and 54 armored vehicles in the border area in late July. CIA reports another 112 vehicles, including 12 tracked vehicles (probably tanks) and 50 armored personnel carriers, on the border at the end of August.

In short, the most critical period for import shortages has past as NVN actions and those of its allies are succeeding in increasing the volume of imports to a level sufficient to support the war and essential civilian needs. We can expect this level to be maintained or even increased over the next few months as the monsoon severely limits air operations.

#### Bomb Damage

Most of the military and economic targets where bombs could do major damage had been hit by July. Little additional damage has been inflicted during the past two months.

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-- About 75 percent of electric generating capacity is out; only a couple of facilities have been repaired and these have been rehit.

-- Most large industrial plants have ceased to function either because of bombing (cement, paper, major textiles) or because of shortages of raw materials.

-- A number of smaller industrial plants, presumably including those considered most essential, have been dispersed to rural locations. Such dispersal will substantially reduce production and add to costs.

-- There are now few attractive industrial targets. In August strikes were made on a brickworks, a wood products plant and a few light fabrication plants.

-- A number of industrial facilities such as the two largest sugar refineries, the largest coal processing plant and the Hanoi power station have not been hit because of current target rules.

In short, because we have already hit most of the high impact targets, we are not adding substantially to the bomb damage inflicted on industry and other non-transportation targets although continued bombing denies NVN the opportunity to reopen damaged facilities.

#### Battlefield Supplies

Much greater damage has been inflicted on the LOCs south through the Panhandle than to LOCs north of Hanoi. The southern rail line is out and the enemy has attempted few repairs, probably because of the priority use of repair resources in the north. Roads have been damaged. Since March 31 over 1500 water craft and over 1600 trucks have been destroyed. The enemy has moved substantial additional resources into this area to repair roads and to increase the number of available trucks and barges to keep up the throughput despite the higher losses. The number of trucks and barges destroyed is less than 10 percent of NVN's estimated inventory.

-- Some Panhandle roads are being improved including use of concrete slabs for surfacing to permit intensive use during the wet season which starts in about a month.

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-- We picked up few reports of supply movements through this area in late July and early August but at least 10,000 enemy troops transited the area during this period.

-- Beginning in mid-August we picked up reports of a major supply offensive including the movement of ammunition at rates far above consumption levels. Troop movements picked up also.

-- There are reports that enemy forces in Laos, also dependent on the Panhandle LOC, are being forced to await supplies while efforts are concentrated on the more critical areas south of the DMZ.

-- Although there have been scattered reports of food, fuel, and ammunition shortages in northern SVN, these shortages may have been caused primarily by local distribution problems. Recent rates of artillery fire do not indicate any serious ammunition shortage on MR-1.

Draw downs on stocks in NVN, SVN and Cambodia may limit enemy activity next dry season unless both war material imports and southward movement can be increased above current levels. We do not know how much the enemy has drawn down his forward stocks in MR-1, and logistics may become a constraint as rains limit supply movements in the NVN Panhandle during the next few months. It may be that the enemy is making an intensified supply effort and drawing down stocks even to critically low levels in order to keep up maximum pressures through October.

We have almost no intelligence on stock levels but what few reports we have indicate stocks within MR-1 are low.

#### Disruption Costs

Although the enemy is overcoming the most serious direct effects of the bombing and mining, he is only able to do this at great cost. Priorities have been drastically changed. In one way or another most North Vietnamese have been required to work more while consumption of non-food items has been reduced.

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-- Large numbers of people are required to repair the damage to LOCs and to operate the much less efficient transportation system. Much of the work is on a part-time basis which is an added strain to the population. Shuttling and truck transportation takes thousands more people than importing through the ports.

-- New construction has virtually halted. Presumably most construction workers are now engaged in damage repair.

-- Most of modern industry is closed. Additional facilities will have to close as supplies of raw materials are exhausted or transportation bottlenecks limit movement of low priority items. For example, the shortage of cement has curtailed activities at many concrete products plants.

-- The shortage of electric power reduces both consumption and production. Some irrigation and flood control pumping now relies on manually operated equipment, reducing efficiency and requiring use of more manpower.

-- The industrialization program to which the regime was giving high priority is virtually halted.

-- Requirements for manpower to offset effects of the bombing must compete with requirements to recruit replacements for losses in the south.

NVN will probably become increasingly efficient in overcoming the effects of the bombing. But the cost of the bombing will continue to mount. New problems will arise as inventories are exhausted and the economy must adjust to lower levels of domestic production. The costs will also mount for the Chinese and USSR who will be asked to provide additional imports to offset the losses in domestic production and the losses caused by the bombing and less efficient transportation system.

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